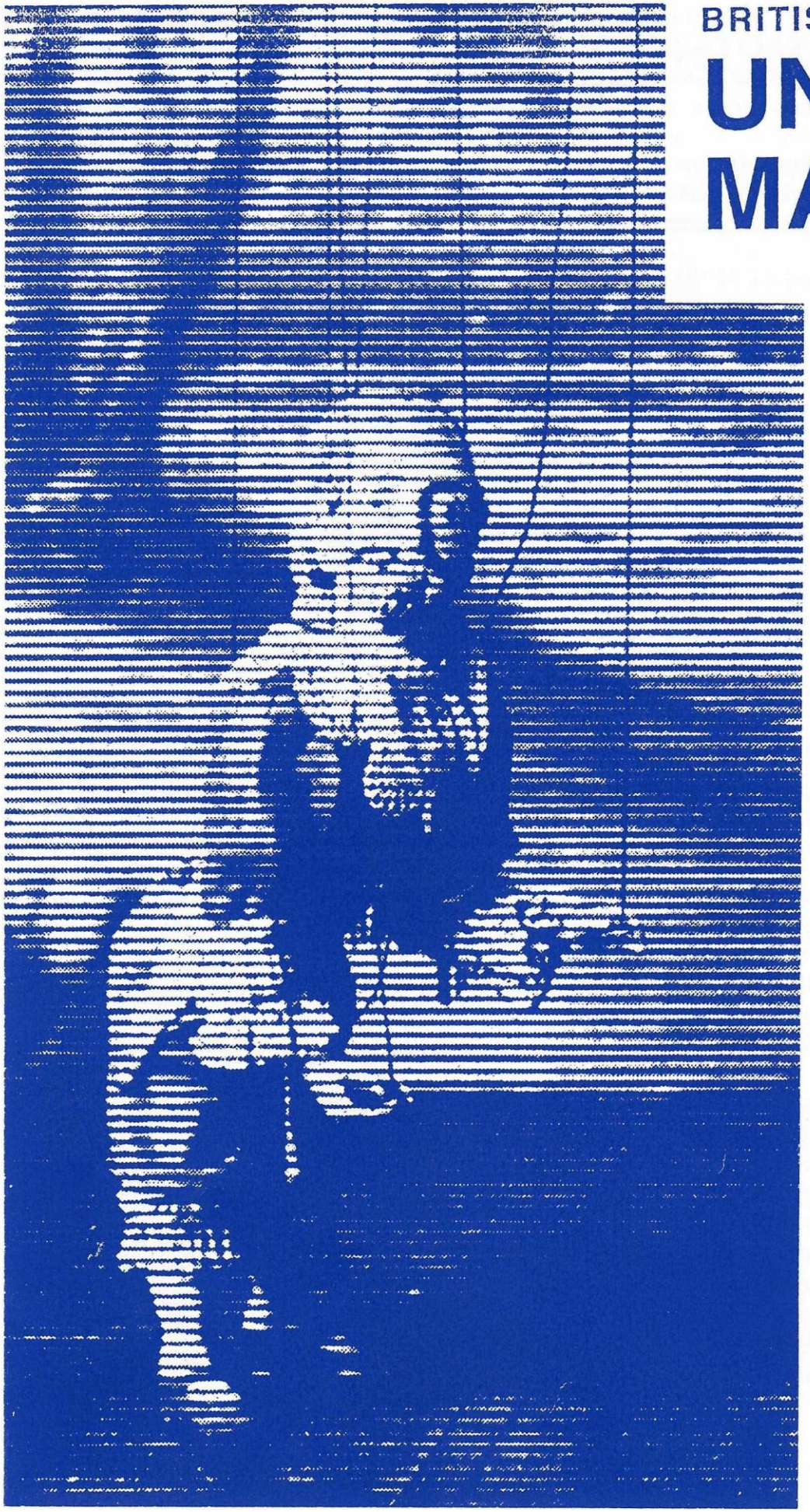
BrUNIMA Bulletin No 99 NOVEMBER 1998

BRITISH UNIMA



BRITISH UNIMA CENTRE BULLETIN

EDITOR - ROBERT FOWLER

NOVEMBER 1998 NO 99

Editorial

We feared when preparing the last issue that John Phillips might not be with us for this one. Sadly, it has so proved. George Speaight wrote a valedictory to John in the last *Newsletter*, and two other members, John McCormick and John Furse, write appreciations here. The first you may know better as an author of books on puppetry, but he is also a puppeteer, having, for example, taken a large-scale production of *Gulliver* to the recent Ljubljana festival; the second is a long-time friend of John's, who is a lecturer in art. Nevertheless, I should like to add just a few words of my own here – as a friend rather than editor – although, in that latter capacity, I shall certainly miss that regular supply of democratic copy from John, no respecter of conventional hierarchies.

The Memorial Service for John Phillips will be held at St Paul's Church, Covent Garden, at 11.30 AM, Saturday 14 November. If you should wish to adjourn afterwards to the Concert Artistes' Association, 20 Bedford Street, would you please let Hilary know as soon as possible on 0171 833 4408.

I first met John – sought him out – after being much impressed by Theatre Grotesque's staging of *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, as well as by the strength of the large carved figures (his moving sculpture), at one of the DaSilvas' much-missed Marsham weekends. In fact, I owe my introduction to and love of rod marionettes to John. (He was even kind enough to suggest a few years later that I give him a hand with them; I reluctantly had to tell the recruiting sergeant that this all-fingers-and thumbs individual would be a bridge too far.)

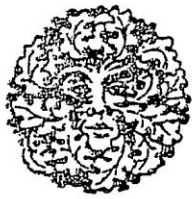
I shared many good times with John as convivial companion thereafter – at home and abroad (BrUNIMA trips to Budapest and Belgium) – and learned much about puppetry and art in general from him, but did not, unfortunately, see as much of his own puppetry as I should have liked (Theatre Grotesque, even more than 19th-century marionettes, being a specialist booking).

Throughout his illness, including his latter, bedridden weeks, John continued his puppetry pursuits (he started young – he still had a puppetry book given him by an aunt when he was three), principally working on the revision of his thesis on Victorian marionettes. And puppetry took up quite a lot of our conversation.

John was also admitted to the Punch and Judy Fellowship this year (the figures he commissioned from Bryan Clarke are now inherited by son Nick, who performed with marionettes with his father) and had become a Member of The Magic Circle last year. A lot of unfinished business, in other words, some of which at least, it is hoped, will be brought to completion.

The two (wheelchair) sorties John made during this time also reflected long-standing passions: the first was to see a *noh* company in London (we watched a *noh* video – specially imported and reformatted – during one of my last visits); the second was to Painshill Park, a family outing, at John's special request, on his last weekend. He shared with Hilary a fascination with the Gothic, and the 14 acres of grounds near Cobham, created by the Honourable Charles Hamilton in the 18th century, fitted the sensuous bill admirably: Gothic temple, Chinese bridge, ruined abbey, grotto, and – also much to John's taste – a vineyard, now planted with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

His approach to life & art was deeply informed, but without pretentiousness or froufrou. He was an artist and a craftsman, a thinker and a maker: a good friend who loved to breathe both the "erudite dust" of the library and the sawdust of popular entertainment has breathed his last. I'll miss your inspiration and company.



After what seemed a fallow period the present is producing a bumper crop of puppetry: VISIONS and its many satellites, a long weekend at the BAC ("the resurgence of puppetry with brains," *The Independent*), Madrileños in Norwich, Slovaks in London, the Penzance Festival.... I suspect that so many events taking place at or around the same time is not necessarily welcome to festival organizers. This also happens to fall badly for our deadline. However, even if the deadline had been kinder, lack of people willing and able to report on these events would rule coverage out. And this is a shame if they are anything like what we saw in Bradford in terms of organization and the quality of the shows. Hats off to Simon Hatfield and Lizzie Allen. Please do therefore as members volunteer. Those of you who are performers will know how frustrating it can be for your achievements to go unrecognized for want of someone out there in the audience, notebook in hand. You are that person.

Green Man logo used by John Phillips' Theatre Gretesque

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A plush private room in Bradford's Alhambra Theatre was the setting for "Lorca, Don Cristobal and the Carnivalesque," BrUNIMA's Annual lecture, delivered by Cariad Astles. The popular, fairground origins of the anarchic, club-wielding Don Cristobal (originally referred to as Don Cristobal Pulchinello) make Cariad's dedication of the lecture to John Phillips particularly apt.

We had to get more chairs in to accommodate the audience, although there were not as many from our own ranks as we might have liked. However, we shall not hold this against you and plan to let you have the delightful lecture soon. "You are a touchstone of the theatre, Don Cristobal. All theatre comes from you... I believe that theatre should return to you"– Lorca.

Non-Ex Cathedra Remarks

Ray DaSilva

First of all, may I wish you all season's greetings from the Committee.

Exactly a year ago I remarked about the good will and the new spirit of cooperation among The British Puppet & Model Theatre Guild, The Puppet Centre Trust and BrUNIMA. It was in last November's *Bulletin,* when we issued *The Earliest English Puppet Play?* by George Speaight, produced through the combined help of the three organizations. During the last twelve months you may have noticed that there have been further beneficial manifestations of cooperation and networking.

Young puppeteers may be puzzled as to why such a natural, commonsensical process has been heralded in all quarters by so much song and dance. Those a little longer in the tooth will recall that it was not always thus. There was, to say the least, much prickliness between the organizations, each trying to outdo the other by attempting to be all things to all puppeteers. It may also seem strange to some why there have to be so many separate national bodies to cater for the needs of, what is, a relatively small community.

Now that the chairs and other representatives are sharing information and actively involving the others in joint projects, we have, in effect, a coalition. But there is a danger. Such a relationship is totally dependent on having committees with an "ecumenical" outlook running each one, and making sure that the focus of each is kept on track and reflected to their memberships by the editors of their respective journals.

During the final year of the current BrUNIMA Committee (elections are next November) we should like to cooperate with the other organizations and try to guarantee the future by cementing the current accord with a sort of Declaration of Interdependence. This would define the respective areas of activity of the organizations and their working relationships with one other so that the incoming committees and staff of these bodies will clearly understand where we all stand. The nature of this interdependence has been touched on in committee and will be discussed further in that forum and at the AGM.

On the second point, regarding the number of organizations, I believe that herein lies our strength. Not only can we more easily attend to particular aspects of puppetry and the particular needs of different puppeteers and enthusiasts, but, as we are, we present a much bolder front to the public (and funding bodies in particular). For example, to see our array of logos side by side in the current VISIONS festival brochure and on the enclosed *Directory of Puppets* leaflet is so much more impressive than any one of them would have been on its own.

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, a warm welcome to Martin MacGilp our new Honorary Membership Secretary and Treasurer. Martin was recommended by John Phillips as his successor after having been concerned with the auditing of BrUNIMA accounts. He is employed in NHS Finance; his interests include woodcarving and researching puppets and puppet theatre in Scotland.

More Networking

Congratulations to Des Turner and to John Alexander on being elected president and chairman respectively of The Punch and Judy Fellowship. Both Des and John are supportive members of BrUNIMA – Des participated in the trip to Belgium last year and John presented a magic-lantern show at our last AGM – they are both people we can do business with. Incidentally, it is worth recalling that the PJF hosted splendidly the final evening of our Belgian Festival this year.

AGM

Our AGM will be on Sunday 28 February 1999, 2.30pm at the Puppet Centre, London. It will be followed by a talk/demonstration/ exhibition of the work of Darcy Turner, one

of the makers of automata featured in the *Devious Devices* exhibition now touring the country – details and review in current *Animations*. Further information on the AGM will be given in the January Newsletter. We expect a lively and enjoyable event so make a note of the date now.

Dues News

Your subscription for 1999 is due now and your renewal form is enclosed with this *Bulletin*.

The good news is that the Committee have decided that the amount is to remain the same as last year (£14 for individuals, £18 for groups and organizations) and also that those paying before January 1 may deduct a discount of £2.00.

If you haven't paid by April 1 you will be considered as lapsed.

Please send your cheque to our new Honorary Treasurer and Membership Secretary Martin MacGilp as soon as possible.

National Directory of Puppets and Related Materials.

This is the working title of a new project supported by all the UK national puppetry organizations. Briefly, this came about because The Society for Theatre Research and the Theatre Museum have recently produced a new directory of Performing Arts Resources, but Puppet Theatre is hardly mentioned. This is not so much the fault of the compilers as the 435 museums which responded to their survey and probably those others which did not bother to reply. Consequently, many important public collections are missing. It seems that the curators do not know what they have got, or they do not regard puppets as performing objects worth mentioning.

To put the matters to rights, and to make sure that items donated by puppeteers to museums do not disappear completely, all the national puppeteers' organizations have agreed to collaborate in compiling a directory devoted to the nation's puppetry treasures.

BrUNIMA Committee members and others put in a lot of time providing you with information, organizing events etc. Here now is something in which, with a small amount of effort, you can easily participate. Please go to your local museum and find out what they have – puppets, printed material and anything related – complete the form enclosed with this *Bulletin* and send it to our member Douglas Hayward, who has kindly agreed to collect and collate the information for us. All we need to know in the first instance is what, if anything, is there, basic details are useful, but bear in mind that each entry will be checked with the museum.

If you really do not have the time to visit your "local," then please do send a donation, as indicated on the form. The finished directory will be a valuable publication for researchers and puppetourists as well as puppeteers, and it will contain acknowledgements to all those who participate in and contribute to the project. There may of course be the possibility of duplication where puppeteers live close to one another, but we would rather duplicate than miss out something important. When planning a visit you could of course check with your colleagues or with Douglas Hayward to make sure that your museum has not already been covered. Douglas's address is on the form, his telephone number is 01283 840348.

So let's be hearing from you. Don't be like the museums which did not bother. Please show us that you care. RD

Long Live the Cookie Monster!

Jeffrey Moss, who wrote music, scripts, and poetry for children, as well as creating that shaggy, archetypal *Sesame Street* muppet, died 25 September. He won the unusual distinction of an obituary in the *New Yorker* magazine; one can also be found in *The Guardian* (10 10 98). The Muppets, by the way, are "at home" at www.muppets.com

I said in the last *Bulletin* that I should like to provide excerpts from an article on contemporary Burmese puppetry which appeared in the Air Mandalay inflight magazine early this year. Unfortunately, my request for permission to do so has not yet been answered. Serendipitously, Janet MacAllister, a puppeteer from New South Wales, with whom I have been in correspondence over Iranian puppetry, came to the rescue, sending me a recent article of hers on this same subject, which she has kindly allowed us to reprint.

Dancers on Strings

Janet Macallister

Puppetry in Myanmar dates back several centuries. Just how far the historians question, but it was probably well established during the Pagan Era in the 11th century. From then, under royal patronage, especially King Bowdaw Paya (1782-1819), it became one of the most popular forms of court entertainment.

So important had drama become in Myanmar that in the 19th century it was the first country in the world to create its own Ministry of Theatre. Alas, with the demise of Burmese royalty, puppetry went into a sad decline and, despite a number of efforts to revive it, today there are only a few puppet master craftsmen left.

It will always be a very expensive and therefore rare art, as it includes not only the skills of the puppet maker – a woodcarver and painter, as well as dresser, who is also a skilful embroiderer – but demands the skills of the manipulator – sometimes the puppets have up to 40-50 strings – a singer and an actor. And, when produced in full, includes a complete orchestra as well. Is it little wonder that today the possibility of seeing a full-length puppet show or *yokthe pwe* is almost impossible. I was, however, able to catch a glimpse of what it might have been like, as I attended a number of marionette performances during a recent visit to the country.

The first was in a large restaurant in Yangon (Rangoon). Both the performance and the restaurant were designed to cater for large tourist parties. The food was Chinese and the "cultural show" included some items of traditional and modern dancing, music, and a few items of traditional marionettes, giving tourists a hint of classical entertainment.

Next I met and talked with puppeteer Ye Dway at his home in Yangon. As we talked I realized that here was a true puppetmaster, who could explain many aspects of the theatre in general and puppet theatre in particular in Myanmar.

He was happy to talk about the "old days," which included his own memories and stories his parents had told. He has some interesting ideas concerning the influences other Southeast Asian countries have had on the development of the arts in Myanmar. He made an interesting distinction between the theatre of the royal court during the days of kings and royal entertainment and the later, "street theatre," which became popular with the people.

He agrees with the theory that Thai drama has been an influence on the development of the theatre in Myanmar, but points out most emphatically that the string-puppet theatre of Myanmar, with plays based mainly on the 550 Jatakas or birth stories of Buddha, is unique to his country

We talked about some of the many mysteries attached to marionettes in Myanmar: these include the rituals and conventions in the making and preparation of the puppets as well as the requirements in the actual storage and presentation of the puppets. Only special wood, at special times of the year, can be cut and prepared for carving. Limbs and torsos are always made from one type of wood, while the faces are made from another. Traditionally puppets must be stored and kept in strict order. "Good" ones must not be exposed to the "bad" influences of the less admirable characters. The prince and princess must be treated with the utmost respect, be stored in special baskets, and never be taken out until just before their performance. Often they are talked to and cared for as if real people.

just before their performance. Often they are talked to and cared for as if real people.

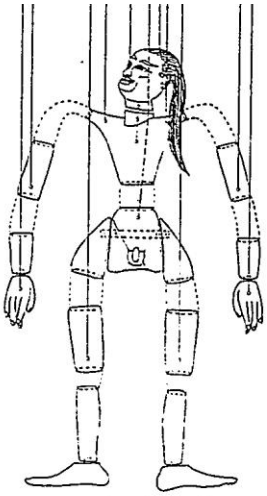
In the production and presentation of the plays there are many conventions which must be observed, otherwise the production will not "proceed without difficulties." These include the offering of the *kadaw pwe*, which consists of bananas and green coconut on a tray decorated with flowers. This offering appears in many Burmese celebrations and is important whether at public performances or in a private home.

Rituals regarding the actual presentation of the puppet play are strictly observed. The characters' entrances and exits must be made on the correct sides (usually the "good" characters – kings, prime minister, and generals etc – on the right side, while the "evil" ones such as the ogres, the lion, galon (garuda) etc exit to the left). Supernatural characters may enter and exit over the wall which forms the backdrop to the stage.

Despite the pure entertainment value of today's marionette performances, many of the taboos that reflect the magical and religious traditions from which they began have been retained. Each puppet represents a traditional character, and a complete set includes 28 basic puppets, with a few minor characters added as needed.

Today the proprietor of the troupe usually owns all the marionettes required for a production. The exceptions can be the prince (Mintha), the princess (Minthamee), and the old prince or elderly prince regent (Minthagyi). They are sometimes provided by their vocalist owners and dressed according to their wishes in expensive silks, velvet, and sequins.

The owners of these usually earn more than the rest of the troupe, and the first two in particular are the objects of great admiration in the *pwe* (theatre). These marionettes are manipulated for the vocalists, the Mintha and Minthamee by leading manipulators, and the Minthagyi by an assistant manipulator, a *gya kyo* (a middle string puller). Other puppeteers who speak their own roles and handle their own marionettes at the same time control the villain and clowns.



One of the difficulties, apart from engaging a sufficient number of experienced manipulators, is finding singers able and willing to participate. Traditionally all the voices – both male and female – are required to be very high, just as they are in classical Burmese theatre. There are not many singers trained in this style, and it is very expensive to hire them for live marionette productions. The alternative is to record the voices.

This involves hiring a recording studio and paying the singers, musicians, and technicians. This is costly, but is usually the preferred option. So today nearly all of the marionette sound comes from cassette tapes. Often tapes have also been made of performances of the marionette plays from the few vinyl recordings still in existence. These tapes are treasured, and the original ones are used only for very special events.

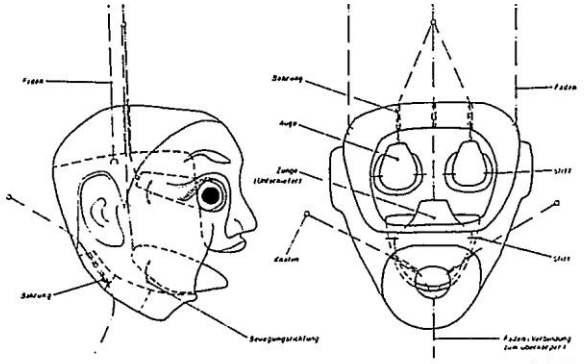
A Marionette Show at Yangon

Ye Dway has converted a front room of his home into a small puppet theatre, which he has named The Golden Gong. It was here that I witnessed what I suspect to be the closest to a true *yoke-thay* or traditional puppet performance available on a regular basis in Myanmar.

A curtained stage has been constructed at one end of the room, complete with lights – electric ones nowadays, kerosene lamps and flickering torches in the past. Backdrops which have been very elaborately painted to depict the jungle and the palace – traditional scenes of the marionette stage – have replaced the plain white curtain backdrop of original marionette performances.

The production I saw required six manipulators, and there were six puppets needed for the first half of the show, and a different six for the second half. The

Illustrations from *Birmanisches Marionenettentheater* by A Bruns & H Thamein



evening's performance followed a fairly traditional format, beginning with an overture. According to Myanmar Buddhist belief, the world has been destroyed a number of times. The death of the old world is symbolized by the crashing of cymbals and the deep resonant sounds of the big gong. These are followed by three repetitions of the boisterous and deafening music called *sin-taing khan*, performed by the *saing-waing* (orchestra).

Special theme music next ushers in the spirit votaress (a spirit medium), she can sometimes be called the lady-in-waiting. Her arrival indicates the new world has come into being. Dressed in red with her traditional long scarf, she performs the Dance of the Natkadaw. Through this the troupe pays respect to the King of the Celestial Beings, Tagyamin. This will ensure that the stage area has been properly purified, and that all goes well with the performance.

It is only right that this part of the marionette show should depict some aspect of the formation of the new world, as it was at this time that Mount Meru was created, out of which grew the legends of Himawunta. This is the forest area at the base of the Himalayas where many of the Jatakas or Buddhist birth stories and many of the Buddhist folk stories and legends are set. According to legend, no humans lived in this area, so it is the supernatural beings from these legends who are featured in the first half of the show.

A beautiful white horse is the first to discover this new world. With flowing mane, rich embroidered saddle and tinkling bells, he prances through the jungle in order to find the measure of the earth. He is followed by the Monkey. It is recorded that when Hanuman, the monkey of the Ramayana, first appeared on the puppet stage it was as an ordinary monkey. No ordinary monkey this one. He is said to have been the first of the earthbound creatures to be created. He can perform many antics and eventually leaves the stage over the top of the backdrop.

He is followed by the Red, and the Green Ogres. These spectacular creatures danced, exhibited their prowess, and then fought each other. These incidental amusements often include fights, which help amuse the younger members of the audience while preserving the continuity of the story and satisfying tradition,

The final scene in the supernatural world features the Zawgyi, the Alchemist. A splendid gentleman in red velvet, with sequined jacket, red hat and shoes, who brandishes a very important red cane, with which he can perform many magic tricks and which he uses to grind his special magic potions from rare herbs.

The Zawgyi holds a special place in Myanmar mythology and therefore in the traditional marionette theatre. He is endowed with supernatural powers such as flying through the air, travelling beneath the earth and oceans, and transforming the fruits of trees into beautiful maidens (with whom he likes to dally). With his magic cane he brings dead men back to life, turns base metal into gold, and grinds magic potions from special herbs. He was a fitting character to draw the first part of the performance to a close.

The second half was devoted to one of the Jataka tales. In the performance I saw it included the prince and princess, traditional characters in beautiful pale embroidered satins, living in gentle harmony in the forest after being banished from the court. Ogres, of course, have to appear and kidnap the princess, who is finally rescued from her ordeal by the King of the Celestial Beings and reunited with her prince, but not before she sings her heart-rending traditional "pathetic song." In this she persuades her consort of her fidelity. The dreadful disease

which has caused his banishment in the first place is miraculously cured, and the couple, reunited, return to the their city amidst great rejoicing.

Unlike in the "old days" of puppet theatre, this program took about an hour rather than a traditional all-night epic, but it gave a brief glimpse of what it might have been like to sit on bamboo mats, in the open air, by the light of flickering torches, and be entranced by the "small people."

Longer programmes and more elaborate plays are sometimes performed at special functions, and plans are under way for these to be made more accessible in the future through further TV performances, and participation in puppet festivals outside Myanmar.

Mandalay Marionettes

When I stayed in Mandalay I visited a theatre called The Mandalay Marionettes. The show there includes the only marionettes now presented on a regular basis in the city.

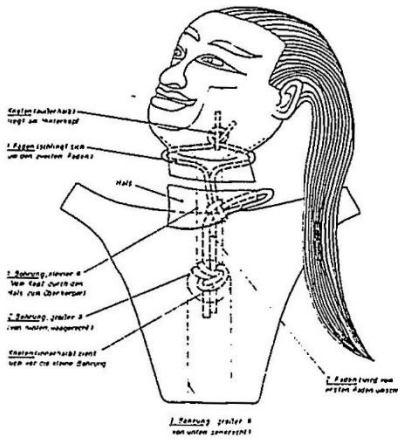
U Tahn Nyunt and Daw Ma Ma Naing, a husband and wife team, in a small theatre, near their home, are working very hard to help preserve the culture of Myanmar.

Unlike the theatre in Yangon, which is devoted only to the puppet theatre, the show in Mandalay contained a series of numbers. The Cultural Show begins with a musical item, either on the traditional xylophone called a *pattala* or the harp called the *myitta shwe-saung*. This graceful instrument is made of wood, leather, and silk ribbons; it has 16 vertical silk strings, and is decorated with gold and flower designs.

Stringed instruments are not traditionally used in Burmese orchestras, and are absent therefore from marionette performances. They are normally confined to concert performances.

Next was a traditional welcoming – a candle dance performed by a young girl, beautifully dressed and made up as a traditional dancer.

The rest of the show consisted of acts from the marionette theatre, including the Horse; the Naga, the monstrous king of serpents; Galon, the mighty king of birds; the ogre Bilu, one of the Burmese favourite folklore demons; and the much-loved rustic comic characters.



All follow the style and character of traditional marionettes and tell one of the well-known stories from folklore or the Jatakas. The final segment, in which the prince, the handsome Mintha, and the princess, the beautiful and romantic Minthamee, perform a traditional love scene, is always the most popular.

As well as staging performances, their theatre contains examples of traditional handicrafts and puppets, which are available for sale.

As the existing theatre seats only about 50, there are ambitious plans in Mandalay for a larger theatre, where longer, more complex performances will be possible. The present number of manipulators would be extended and, under the tutelage of puppetmaster U Pan Aye, the less experienced members of the troupe would improve their skills, enabling the company to extend its repertoire. This could also mean performing at other venues in Mandalay and touring to other parts of Myanmar and overseas. With these plans in mind a complete set of 28 puppets has almost been finished by U Than Nyunt.

Sometimes the big tourist hotels request The Mandalay Marionettes perform, and they appear at special official functions. Unless they are very careful, there is the danger that the demands made on the troupe by venue management could cause them to lose their identity and independence. This can only happen if the management requests the inclusion of unsuitable "modern" acts or the introduction of too many nontraditional puppet characters. This the troupe feels is not in keeping with the traditional style of

identity and independence. This can only happen if the management requests the inclusion of unsuitable "modern" acts or the introduction of too many nontraditional puppet characters. This the troupe feels is not in keeping with the traditional style of entertainment on which they are attempting to build their theatre.

These points were at the forefront of discussions I had with the puppet theatre administration. Well aware of the problems which might be caused in accepting some of these engagements, they feel sufficiently independent to be able to overcome them. And they realize that the more exposure the troupe receives, the more recognition their art form gains; and the more financially secure they become, the greater their chances of realizing their plans and in so doing helping to preserve the culture.

There are, I understand, a number of other marionette makers and manipulators in both Yangon and Mandalay, and a limited number in other places, including Bagan and Shan State. I saw the theatre in Bagan, but was not able to track down a performance in the time I had available.

I was told that one of the reasons other troupes do not perform regularly is lack of financial resources. Looking at the costs involved in putting together a marionette production, I could well understand that. After having met the puppeteers, I think a good deal of their survival has depended on their own hard work and dedication as well as good management.

Official Recognition

Recognition of the value of the marionettes and their place in the cultural life of Myanmar was demonstrated by the introduction last year of a Puppetmaster Section in the annual Performing Arts competition held in Yangon. This was won by U Pan Aye, who is from The Mandalay Marionettes and is a former pupil of Master Shwebo U Tin Maung. He now wears with much pride at every performance the gold medal which was presented to him. There are plans for this competition to be extended to include puppeteers who have not yet reached the status of Master in order to encourage the younger, less experienced manipulators.

Both troupes have appeared on local TV. I saw one performance on Mandalay TV of the local marionettes and was impressed by the amount of time allowed, the detailed coverage, and the very clear accompanying English voice-over. As TV is available in many homes as well as the hotels and guest houses in both Yangon and Mandalay at least, the show was available to locals as well as tourists.

Whether the marionettes of Myanmar can survive the pressure of the 20th century I do not know. With the competition of mass media, film, TV, and other modern entertainment, the Burmese themselves are not so interested in the indigenous culture. Possibly, the "patronage" of tourism, if it continues, will help keep it alive. It would be very sad to see the total passing of a unique art form which for generations has provided pleasure, instruction, and delight to all who have witnessed it.

Margareta Niculescu is Retiring from the IIM

Penny Francis MBE

Having been the Director of the Institut International de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mézières since 1985, and Principal of its three-year training course since its inception in 1986, Margareta Niculescu has decided to retire from the end of this year. She told me that she feels the time is right for her to take life a little more easily and to place the reins in younger hands. Her achievements during all those years have been many. She is a woman with a creative intelligence, a breadth of vision and depth of culture combined with a number of practical, entrepreneurial skills, not to mention an ability to raise funds for her enterprises, which are breathtaking. She has made the Institute the cultural capital of

world puppetry. No one in the history of puppetry has done so much to advance the appreciation and status of the art form as Margareta Niculescu. British UNIMA adds its congratulations and thanks to those which will be reaching her from all over the globe. Goodbye to the Institut will certainly not mean goodbye to her artistic and advisory activities, nor to her travels. We wish her a fulfilling and pleasant future. (A longer study of her work will be written for the next UNIMA *Bulletin.*)

Her successor is Roman Paska, a highly respected puppeteer who has toured with his solo work through many countries of the world, and who has in recent years been responsible for the conception and direction of several widely-praised larger-scale productions, for instance, in Ireland, Spain, Sweden and New York. Paska has often worked with the students at the Charleville School (known as ESNAM) and is a well-known figure in the town.

Theatre Notebook

I thought it useful to draw readers' attention to this publication of The Society for Theatre Research and The Theatre Museum as it contains occasional articles on puppetry – ones by George Speaight and John Phillips come to mind. And *Theatre Notebook*, Volume LII, No 2, 1998, does in fact carry an interesting (20-page) article "English Puppets and the Survival of Religious Theatre," by Margaret Rogerson.

It argues that biblical drama lived on beyond its conventional end-date of around 1604, its survival being "the result of discerning transformation of the 'medieval' tradition by the professional showmen of the puppet theatre." Puppets, unlike actors, managed to avoid charges of blasphemy – "wanton 'jesting' with God through the presentation of the Scriptures on stage." Puppets remained "outside the frame of reference of the anti-theatricalists" and were still able to earn a living even after the London theatres were closed in 1642. Rogerson's concluding paragraph reads: "Human actors and dramatists, then, appear to have felt some measure of amused outrage that the regulations that kept them in check were not made to apply to the theatre of the puppet showmen. But while Punch and his associates may have been able to play the supposedly forbidden roles of biblical characters in the presentation of the Creation to Doomsday story, their days were numbered. Finally even the puppets had to relinquish the Scriptures and by the end of the eighteenth century, the 'medieval' Creation to Doomsday play ceased to be performed. Joseph Strutt, whose book on English sports and pastimes was published in 1801, considered that the 'revival of pantomimes ... proved the utter undoing of the puppet-show men.' Human actors therefore eventually triumphed over the puppets, but in the opinion of Strutt, there was yet another irony: 'all the absurdities of the puppet-show, except the discourses, are retained in the pantomimes, the difference consisting principally in the substitution of living puppets for wooden ones'. With this decline of the puppets in the favour of the theatre-going public came the final suppression of religious drama on the English stage. The puppet showmen are to be admired, though, for the strategies they used to continue the Creation to Doomsday tradition of the 'medieval' English theatre for two hundred years after its supposed demise."

There are three issues of *Theatre Notebook* a year, with the subscription costing £18.00, £13.50 to STR members, but it may be available at your local library. While it is always more agreeable to have one's own copy of a publication, some books are expensive nowadays – for example, McCormick and Pratasik's *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800-1914* (reviewed in the last issue) costs £50. However, your library, including its interlibrary loan service, should mean you do not have to deny yourself either periodicals or books.

Enterprise & Good Causes

Congratulations to the Puppet Theatre Barge for coming up with such a novel scheme to raise funds for a new production as asking for sponsorship of a Leander Club crew to row in a 22-mile race on the Thames. The "veterans" came third in their class, 81st overall on handicap (irrelevant), raising £818.14, which is to be matched by the City of Westminster. *Macbeth* will be launched next year.

I also heard from *Rise Phoenix*'s fundraiser. This company has toured Bosnia over the last five years, entertaining children with puppets. They are there for a month this October. Their aim is that by "Working with other children's charities we will educate, entertain and socialize young people in towns and villages where years of conflict have torn up the normal community bonds. By offering children the chance to be involved in creative and co-operative ventures we will encourage trust and friendship, helping dispel the mistrust and hatred that is the legacy of so many years of war. We want to halt the increase in drug use and crime among young people."

"During this trip we will lay the foundations of the *Bosnian Magical Tour*, a permanent touring puppet theatre and cinema. This project will involve Bosnian artists, attract performers from all over Europe and take the work of *Rise Phoenix* to every corner of the country, involving children of any age, race or creed."

The company is also investigating the possibility of setting up a permanent puppet centre in Sarajevo in association with a local arts and drama group called *Be My Friend.*

Back home, they have it in mind to run regular weekly workshops for underprivileged children in London. They hope to open a fund-raising stall selling Indian clothes, jewellery, herbs etc in Camden Lock market on or around 15 November. The company is a registered charity (No 1042618) and any donations can be made payable and sent to Rise Phoenix, Block C, Imperial Works, Perrin St, London NW5 3ED.

I asked them to discover what they could about Ante Hrkać, a *karadjoz* (*karagöz*) player from Sarajevo, who was written about in the *Bulletin* (Nos 91 and 92), back in 1996. They have, unfortunately, been unable to come up with any information to date.

Festival of Central European Culture, June-July 1998

The Festival of Central European Culture was mentioned in the last issue only in respect of the Milan Sládek mime company from Bratislava (see also Charles Broughton's review of *Le Nozze di Figaro* in *Animations*, August/September), but there was another puppetry show featured in the festival, Archa Theatre's *Solstice*, which is worth drawing attention to if only because of the presence in it of Petr Nikl.

Nikl (born Zlín, 1960) is a painter and sculptor but also a stage designer and puppeteer. I first saw him in an exhibition of four contemporary artists from the Czech Republic called "Distant Voices" at the South London Gallery, in 1994. He regularly gives puppetry performances at his exhibitions, as he did in Camberwell, "as manifestations of a kinetic 'art of the present'" (as Michael Summerfield put it, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 23 9 94). These performances feature traditional hand-carved figures (puppetry has been in his family for generations) and his own surreal ones (much in evidence in *Solstice*).

Even before Archa Theatre opened its doors, in 1994, it promoted improvisational Czech puppetry and street performances throughout Europe and today regularly produces Nikl's work. To quote Archa's programme notes, its "godfathers... include American musician John Cale [okay, but born Garnant, South Wales] and Japanese dancer/choreographer Min Tanaka, who created the performance for the grand opening of the theatre. Both these artists regularly return to the Archa Theatre to

perform, and also to work with local artists on new collaborations."

It is therefore worthwhile, I would suggest, seeing what is on at Na Poříčí 26 if you are in the Czech capital. I shall do so myself, anyway, at the next opportunity, despite having eventually left out of the last *Bulletin* a review of *Solstice*, a show of some technical accomplishment and artistic intention and merit, on the grounds that I failed to understand it, although spectators would, unsurprisingly, have found many themes and devices in common between the preoccupations of Nikl's stage piece and his studio work – time, dreams, childhood, water and fire, assemblages of used objects (objects with a history).

The Festival contained many treats whose nature precludes their coverage in a puppetry magazine, but one short Czech film from the mid-thirties (an unbilled, last-minute replacement, as it happens), *Ruce v útery* (*Hands on Tuesday*), while its "stellar cast of hands" (it was shot for an association of the deaf) includes little direct puppetry, certainly does impinge on it. After the show, Michal Bregant, who chose the Czech film programmes, told me he thought I would like the film, given the involvement in it of Vladimír Šmejkal, who had been a member of Prague's important Říše loutek (Realm of Puppets) theatre, founded 1920. He also told me that recent research had reassessed the relative contribution to the film of Čeněk Zahradníček and Vladimír Šmejkal in the latter's favour (when I first saw the film, as part of the Czech Modernism season at the National Film Festival, some years ago, the programme handout credited only Zahradníček) and that *Iluminace*, the journal of film theory, history, and easthetics, of which he is editor, would be carrying a feature on Šmejkal to this effect. The next issue did indeed carry very interesting material on Šmejkal, the opening article, "Vladimír Šmejkal. Unknown Artist of the Czech Avant-Garde," setting the tone. I will try to summarize the findings sometime.

On mentioning the Sládek show to our general secretary at a recent committee meeting I learned that she had not only seen the performance of *Le Nozze di Figaro* at the Bloomsbury but had been acting as Sládek's interpreter there, having worked with him in Cologne for four years (1978-1981), where, by her account, he established a "demanding" daily regimen. Despite being busy, she was receptive to my suggestion that she write a few words about him.

East Meets West

Lorraine von Gehlen

Do we mean "Bunraku meets Muppets"? Could it be "Wayang Golek meets Animatronics"? Closer to home in fact: Eastern and Western Europe feed quite different influences into our puppet theatre, so it was perhaps not pure chance when a Slovak actor and puppeteer working in Bratislava, having first embraced French classical mime, then founded a theatre company in a country then still on the knife's edge between West and East Europe – Germany.

Milan Sládek was part of the East European culture of team work, the ensemble theatre approach with a repertoire built up over years. Having emigrated to the West in 1968, he could then pursue his dream inspired by *Les Enfants du Paradis* and become a white-faced solo mime artist. But that would not do... he had to set up a mime-theatre company with its own venue, salaried performers, and regular programme of in-house productions. He succeeded in achieving this in 1974 in Cologne, West Germany. It was indeed the only such company in West Europe. He named it after his solo mime character: Theater Kefka, later becoming known internationally as the Cologne Mime Theatre Company.

Puppetry was where Milan Sládek started: from carving wooden puppets, through drama training, and work with Czech director Burian, to leading the Mime Studio of the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava, which included puppet theatre in its programme. This mix of movement-based theatre and puppetry continued at Theater Kefka, to be taken back to Bratislava when

the drawing back of the Iron Curtain allowed Sládek to return at last to his home town, where he now heads Theater Arena.

The kind of puppets used are typically 2-3-ft-high figures with a rod to the back of the head, and direct hand control of other body parts, the black-clad puppeteer being visible, except in the black-light theatre productions, where the combination of black velvet and ultraviolet light hid the puppeteers and their transformation tricks. This style of work demands an adequate number of performers, often two or three operating one puppet – in perfectly rehearsed harmony with each other. Some of the black-light work used a clever device: side lighting down-stage allowed "Kefka" to perform in full view while other performers and puppets came magically in and out of view just behind the "wall of light" – for example, in *The Gift*, which was, incidentally, banned in Czechoslovakia because the story of an egg hatching into a sweet little bird that grows into a huge creature that eats up the hero could be seen as a statement about oppression by the Soviet Union.

It may be argued that large direct-control puppets are best manipulated by movement artists, where their sense of rhythm, stage space, body expression, and visual composition is transferred directly into the puppets. Released from the booth and technical controls, puppets can become exceedingly expressive while achieving things that human performers cannot. Anyone who saw Theater Arena's puppet-based version of *The Marriage of Figaro* during the Festival of Central European Culture in London in June will appreciate exactly what is meant. Great things can happen when performers and puppets work together in a choreographed space.

Anton Anderle: The Family Tree

Marionette theatre was largely introduced to Slovakia by Czech and Moravian troupes in the 19th century. Ján Stražan's marionette theatre was the first Slovak touring theatre and also the first to stage plays by Slovak authors. He was indisputably the key figure in Slovak folk puppetry of his lifetime (1856-1939). The roots of Anton Anderle (born 1944) go back to that tradition via his grandmother, Eva Kouřilová, who was adopted into the Stražan family. Eva, married to Michal Václav Anderle, bought a marionette theatre, previously owned by Stražan, and inspired the interest of her sons, Bohuslav and Jaroslav, who worked first with the Stražans and then, from 1929 onwards, on their own. The family troupe continued until 1955, although the brothers never completely stopped performing. Anton had helped his father and uncle but then worked as an engineer until the end of the 1980s, when he returned to puppetry as a full-time profession. He is not only a performer but a collector, restorer, and maker of marionettes.

Having myself remarked on the "fine voices" of Anton Anderle and Henrik Kemény in a review in the *Bulletin* in July 1996, I was pleased to see a subsection devoted to this important performance element in John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik's splendid *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800-1914*, where Anderle's vocal range is described as running, in *Don Šajn* (*Don Juan*), from "a slight falsetto for Dona Karolina to a basso profundo for Don Avenez...." I was also pleased to learn elsewhere ("The Destiny of a Family" by Ladislav Lajcha, in *theatre czech & slovak*, 3/92) when preparing this that his father, Bohuslav, was "endowed with a nice melodious voice" while Jaroslav was better known for his dexterousness. In my opinion, Anton has inherited in full the characteristics of both his father and uncle. In addition to the two aforementioned sources, I would also recommend a short article by UNIMA Councillor Ida Polívková-Hledíková ("Marionettes in Slovakia," *Slovak Theatre*, National Theatre Centre, Bratislava, 1992), which has fine illustrations, and, if you can obtain it, the booklet *Welt Der Puppen Marionetten aus der Sammlung Anton Anderle/Svet Bábok Bábky-Marionety zo*

Zbierky Antona Anderleho). Martin Bridle describes working with Anton, and the Slovak Punch analogue, Gašparko, in the article "Gasparko: Echoes of Punch's Past" (*Around the World with Mr. Punch*, Vol 1, No 3 Autumn 96).

Peter Charlton very kindly agreed to do a necessarily brief stop-press review of Anton Anderle's show. *The Smallest Circus in the World* exemplifies for me Anton's father's maxim that "Genius is simplicity." I also saw a 10-minute excerpt from *Don Šajn*, performed with rod marionettes. I must see a full-length version. As to successors, I can tell Peter that Anton places his hopes in his grandchildren's hands, his two sons and daughter being otherwise engaged.

Treat in Store

Peter Charlton

On 23 and 24 October the Slovak puppeteer Anton Anderle gave four performances at Whiteley's Department Store in Queensway, West London, as part of The Festival of Slovak Culture. His coming was, for some strange reason, kept secret by the Slovak Embassy – so secret that even the manager of Whiteley's denied knowledge of any puppet shows less than a week before the event! It is regrettable that we only had a short time to spread the news to puppetry enthusiasts. If you were one who did not manage to make the trip to the store you missed a huge treat.

Anderle is the only puppeteer in Slovakia still performing in the "classical folk" tradition. I hope he has a family to pass his skills on to, for he is a formidable performer. I was only able to get to see one of his shows, *The Circus*. The sheer energy of the performance is enough to buoy you up for the rest of the day, nay, the rest of the week. The show is compered by an engaging, cheeky clown called Kuki, who introduces each act with great bravura – and even sets the props for some of them. There is such a succession of acts, all performed with great energy and manipulative skill, that it is breathtaking. Jugglers, acrobats, chair balancers, and horse acts seem to jet on and off, each one holding some surprise even for someone who has seen a lot of puppet circuses. I do not think that I have ever before seen a strongman act where I believed the barbells were truly heavy, nor a tightrope walker with so much beauty and grace. I was told that Anderle speaks only Slovak and German, but his "intros" were a wonderful mixture of English and French – full of fun too. The musical accompaniment by his companion, Ján, on melodeon and bagpipe enhanced the enjoyment and pace of the show.

Somehow or other we have got to find a way of bringing Anderle back to the UK, next time with plenty of pre-show publicity and for a longer stay than two days.

Trestle Theatre's Latest Beggars Belief

Penny Francis MBE

The well-known mask and mime company, Trestle Theatre, has recently undertaken a collaboration with the Kherson Puppet Theatre of the Ukraine, the result of which is *Beggars Belief,* which toured Britain in May and June, then played in the Ukraine, and is now back in Britain, perhaps at a theatre near you, on tour until December.

The cooperation of the Kherson Theatre and Trestle started three years ago. For *Beggars Belief* three Ukrainian puppeteers formed part of the original company, and their great skill and knowledge of puppetry technique are impressive, according to another member of the company, Christiane Hess, who has just completed a postgraduate year as a student of puppetry and theatre at the Central School of Speech and Drama. On her return from the Ukraine, where the Kherson puppeteers left the tour, she has taken over much of the puppet manipulation in addition to the several masked characters she also plays.

Beggars Belief is the first of a trilogy called "The Power Plays," and takes the paintings of Peter Breughel as inspiration for a medieval story told in *commedia dell'arte* style, about two itinerant puppeteers, once prospering clockmakers, blinded by a

villainous Mayor and his henchmen, and the manner of the puppeteers' revenge. There is spoken text, but in no known language: as always with this company, the plastic or visual elements are the strongest media of communication.

The set conveys, literally and by suggestion, a landscape of villages, with great castle walls, gates and drawbridge, and colourful fairgrounds or crossways where the puppeteers bring the enormous cart on which their unusually large-scale show is set up. A high point of the production is the miming of a long journey from one village to another, uphill and down dale, of the cart and the puppeteers passing village folk going about their business with their animals and their wares. The journey, only from one side of the stage to the other, seemed long and arduous, thanks to the invention of the director and the skilled physicality of the excellent cast.

The puppets made by the Ukrainian company were very well employed and operated, but in appearance they were quite out of keeping with the rest of the design, being large rod-puppets of the Obraztsov Moscow school, with the typical round eyes and blank expressions of that era, the sixties especially. They simply do not accord with the Breughelesque masks, settings and costumes of the rest of the show.

It is nevertheless well worth seeing: a colourful and high-spirited entertainment with a strong story and plenty to engage the eye. For more information on the remaining dozen touring venues and dates contact Penny Mayes at Trestle headquarters on 0181 441 0349, or look at the listings in *Animations*.

Púca Puppets

John McCormick

Púca puppets are one of Ireland's new and rapidly developing puppet companies. The central members are Niamh Lawlor and Helene Huegel, but they have a circle of backup people upon whom they draw for special skills. Last winter they offered their first full show, *An unusual Christmas*, and since then they have been very active in developing new work. For this year's Irish International Puppet Festival at the Lambert Theatre, Dublin, they offered two solo shows and an experimental shadow piece. The last of these was work in progress by Helene Huegel (currently studying with the London School of Puppetry) and was presented in that context. Helene also presented a version of the Fable of the Hare and the Tortoise, and Niamh a version of the Town Rat and the Country Rat. Both were booth shows with glove puppets, and part of the interest was the way in which they allowed one to see the individual strengths of the two performers in question.

Vocally, Niamh Lawlor is an interesting performer. Town Rat and Country Rat allowed for interesting verbal interchange and reminded one how a good traditional puppeteer can hold audiences with the voice. The action of the piece was as slight as the fable, but involved two splendid rodents in painted foam with clearly differentiated characters, a Jerrylike cat who made a brief appearance, and some rather repellent pieces of "food," realistically cut out of foam and painted. This was a show for a younger audience which adults could also enjoy because of the lively banter between the rats and a good understanding of timing and rhythm. Helene's show was also, literally, a "two-hander," hare and tortoise. The figures and their manipulation instantly evoked the characters involved. Hare, bouncy as Tigger, could easily have appeared in *Alice in Wonderland*. Tortoise, a shell on top of an arm and hand clad in a dark green stocking to represent body, neck and head, was also an amazingly convincing figure. The whole piece was carried off with enormous brio, but the repetitive structure (the different laps of the race) sometimes led to slight lapses in the timing and consequent loss of rhythm, though the show was still very enjoyable. The irrepressible hare was most appealing,

and the more philosophical tortoise proved a marvellous foil.

Two cameo pieces, but ones which augur well for Púca in the future.

John Phillips – Historian and Aesthetician of the English Marionette Theatre

John McCormick

Historians of the puppet theatre are in short supply. This is not surprising, since most of the available surviving documentation is patchy and a great deal of research will often yield only meagre results. However, detailed work in archives and newspaper files does throw up a surprising amount of information. John Phillips, in addition to his teaching and his own practical work with puppets, spent some 20 years combing through such important primary sources as *The Era* (precursor of *The Stage*), and the result has been the amassing of an amazing amount of factual information about Victorian marionettes and the people who worked with them. George Speaight, in his monumental *History of the English Puppet Theatre* left a number of doors ajar, waiting for further researchers to push them, and John Phillips was without doubt the most important person to do just that. His substantial articles on D'Arcs and on Holdens, Bullocks and other Victorian marionette companies have appeared recently in *Theatre Notebook* and *The Puppetry Yearbook*, but he has also published shorter articles and notes, often to be found in backnumbers of *Animations*, *The Puppet Master* and the *Bulletin.*

Many of John's articles are informed by his interest in perception. His concern was not merely with what was presented to the spectator, but also with what the spectator actually received from a performance, and the extent to which the spectator's expectations conditioned the "reality" of the stage action. Not strictly a semiotician or theoretician, John has often brought an artist's perception to the puppet event, as well as a sound pragmatic awareness of what happens on stage and in the audience during a marionette performance. Some of his minor observations are in themselves very interesting, notably his emphasis on the manner in which a puppet's eyes are painted (staring doll or illusion of life), and he offers a third possible explanation to the strings or wires stretched vertically in front of many marionette stages: not to conceal the strings, or protect the figures from projectiles, but create an effect of continuity of vision, thus enhancing a sense of the reality of the stage and its action.

Some of John's most spectacular work as a historian and scholar has been done on D'Arcs Marionettes and Waxworks. This company was briefly mentioned by Speaight, and from this hint, John went on to unearth a huge amount of information about a major company (he even rediscovered some of the figures) and has demonstrated convincingly that when WJ Bullock went into the marionette business it was in Liverpool where he bought up material from Lambert D'Arc, and that this was the basis of Bullock's marionettes.

The one English marionette family to enter legend, wherever it went, especially in continental Europe, was the Holdens. However, much of the information about them was myth (often encouraged by themselves), and the amount of properly documented factual material has been fairly limited. Again it is thanks to John that many of the complications as to who was who in that family have been sorted out.

His writing and research is full of little snippets of information about the various showmen whose names crop up in passing references, and from time to time he throws the spotlight on such figures as Sam Baylis.

Recently he has also examined the ghost shows which toured fairgrounds and, as travelling fit-ups, were remarkably similar to the marionette theatres. This very similarity allows us to extrapolate further evidence about the portable theatres for marionettes where details are often missing or the picture is incomplete, but he also reminds us of the

entire context of leisure activity into which the Victorian marionette theatre fitted.

A lesser aspect of John's research is the 18th century and he has thrown some valuable light on the relationship between Henry Fielding and the puppet theatre, as well as examining the work of the scenic artist de Loutherbourg, whose Eidophusikon was, understandably, of great interest to John.

The rod-marionette was of particular fascination to John and, as a sculptor, he was able to create his own figures for such pieces as *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. Not surprisingly, he was extremely familiar with the marionette tradition of Belgium and the "pupi" one of Sicily, and there is no doubt but that the awareness of these traditions also had their part in extending John's terms of reference in his study of the puppet performance event.

When he took over the Tiller-Clowes marionettes from George Speaight (although roughly half of them remained in Germany until quite recently), he had the benefit of a real Victorian company to hand, and a source of constant inspiration.

Altogether, it seems that if only John could have benefited from his retirement for a few more years, he would most certainly have translated his love of the marionette into a fascinating and absorbing book. Having said this, we should be immensely grateful to him for the significant amount of material he has published and for the insight which accompanied it.

Post Scriptum: Shortly before he died, with a characteristically generous gesture, John passed his research material on to the present writer. It is therefore planned that the book which John should have completed will still materialize.

In Natty Hipster Flares

John Furse

John Phillips may have made magic – swallowed swords and eaten fire – but he also made sculpture and worked the late-sixties art school circuit. Nineteen sixty-eight is 30 years past, but the then-lean and seductive Phillips, in natty hipster flares, was a familiar sight in many an artist's studio. Ian Breakwell has memories of the occasion in the Institute of Contemporary Arts bar when an almighty crash in the main gallery disturbed an enlightened intellectual discourse. The Phillips contribution to the major exhibition "Play Orbit" – a somewhat overstretched rubber membrane suspended from the ceiling – had literally brought the house down. As ever the response was instant: "Bloody Hell, let's get out of here."

Much of the art was reckless – it was the age of "counter culture," but in the drawing studio all was strictly to the point. Workshop practice was perhaps his forte – in spite of fragile plaster he was very much a practical man, and many art students still remember with affection the manner in which he taught them to see. His History of Art was sound, and few dared to question his knowledge of 18th- and 19th-century imagery, but during his long relationship and eventually marriage to the painter Avis Newman, the making of Modern Art was his working life. The major piece of on-site sculpture at the University of Wales at Aberystwyth is a lasting reminder of what he made then – it is still intact. Recently, in the summer of 97, it needed running repairs, but these were carried out to mutual satisfaction – "Clap hands here comes Phillips" – he did them himself!

John Phillips understood art and its making and he also understood the dangers involved in an ever-changing educational system. A stalwart union man, he fought many battles on behalf of both staff and students in the disruptive 1970s and 80s, and plenty respected him for that. Those who met him later soon realized that he never suffered fools gladly. The theatre and the circus and perhaps above all the fairground were very dear to him, but there was also a love of less extrovert activities. His collection of English watercolours reflected a less turbulent side to his nature – the 20th-

century delicacies of John Nash were very close to his heart, and the fact that he is "scattered" in a peaceful stretch of water overlooked by a Folly seems to sum it up. Theatre Grotesque and the Sublime on the one hand – the modesty of Nash on the other.

I regret that he never got around to mounting *Ensor*, but I have the two heads he carved for what might have been. His performances were nothing if not lively and, oddly enough, slightly camp. "Blodwyn the Mad Monk" – Ian Breakwell called him after one bizarre falsetto offering, and that too feels right.

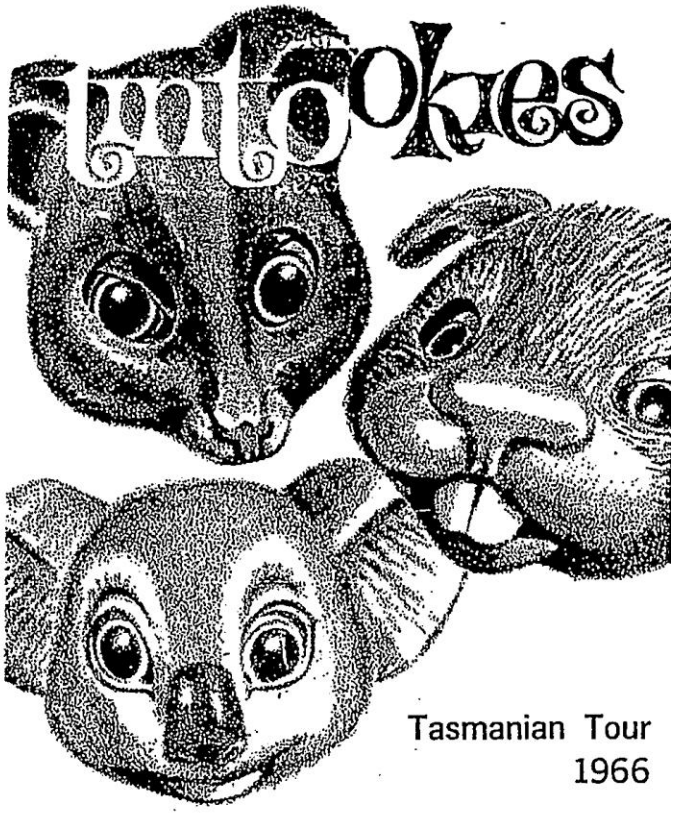
In his last week he bought two copies of *Strange Feats & Clever Tricks* – one for me and one for himself – and NOW, Bloody Hell, the "Great Bald Eagle" is dead. That's very sad.

John became a Member of The Magic Circle last year on submission of a paper which traced the history of the Pepper's Ghost illusion *The Ghost! The Ghost!! The Ghost!!!* This has been reprinted by Arcady Press and is available at £4.50 from Pollock's or Ray DaSilva.

Peter Scriven, MBE (1930-1998)

Peter Scriven has just died in Brisbane. He first burst on to the Australian scene at the Elizabethan Theatre in Sydney's Newtown in 1956 with *The Tintookies*, creating a spectacular puppet show for large theatres which told an Australian story (Scriven claimed that "Tintookies" was an Aboriginal word meaning "the little people who live in the sandhills"). Ten years later the Marionette Theatre of Australia was established to tour productions in Australia and Asia. On a seven-month tour of Asia in 1966-1967 a company of 10, including Scriven, carrying 2½ tonnes of equipment, performed in India, Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Laos, Indonesia, Singapore, Korea, the Philippines, and Malaysia. On a later tour they drove through the Khyber Pass to get from Rawalpindi to Kabul. His last major production, using some of the original 1956 sound-tape, was an entire remake of *The Tintookies*. It opened in 1975 and toured Asia, where he had chosen to live, in early 1976.

Scriven was a flamboyant figure who "in his heyday cut a fine figure in Sydney society, dressed in well-tailored suits and driving a Bentley (rumoured to have been unregistered)." "He was a respected member of Sydney's artistic and theatrical community, and for many an older Australian the very word 'puppet' still calls to mind the once-famous names of his Tintookies... and a hint of their magic.



Tasmanian Tour
1966

"His own favourite was *Little Fella Bindi*, which tells of a young Aboriginal boy who is befriended by native animals but finally has to part from them to join the adult world. He was dismayed that some people found the ending too sad."

Older readers may be aware that Scriven worked for a short time with Waldo Lanchester. The above information is taken from a touching appreciation of Scriven's life, chronicling the downs as well as the ups, by Richard Bradshaw, published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 October, which is available to members on request.

Passing of a Master: "object lesson in puppet manipulation"

Lee Tien-lu died 13 August, aged 87, at his family home in Sanchih, at the northern tip of Taiwan. Recognized as a "national treasure," Lee revitalized the folk art of glove puppetry (*budaixi*), introduced to Taiwan by immigrants from Fujian Province in the early 19th century.

It is, thankfully, possible to gain an insight into Lee's biography by viewing Hou Hsaio-Hsien's well-received film *The Puppet master** (1993), which relates the first half of Lee's life (Taiwan was under Japanese occupation 1895-1945). Lee, a charismatic figure in black, is the narrator (he appeared as an actor in four of Hou's films). When his company visited this country in 1994, it was a delight to discover him behind the scenes at The Unicorn after the show, looking just the same as in the film, a courteous, smiling presence, although his son, Lee Chuan-tsai, had taken over the manipulation by then.

JF Keating writes: "Over 500 puppet troupes exist in Taiwan. The greatest danger they face is perhaps not a scarcity of budget or students, but audiences that have lost their sense of imagination; audiences whose minds are dulled by the non-challenging format of TV shows [so] that they have lost the ability to relate to the drama of puppets. Some observers note with wonder, in fact, that the dedication of someone like Lee Tien-lu seems to be more recognized in France than in Taiwan" ("High Drama With a Slight of the Hand!" [sic] – www.sinica.edu.tw/tit/culture/1294_puppet.html). It is fitting therefore that France should have hosted Lee's I Wan Jan company a month before his death, the troupe forming part of an acclaimed Taiwanese presence at the Avignon Festival, comprising three puppet companies and the (mainly) percussive U-Theatre (said to be "the best show of the festival").

Nevertheless, we too were appreciative. John Blundall, who organized a reception for Lee's company in 1994 at the Magical World of Puppets Gallery, Birmingham, wrote (*Bulletin* No 86): "... Li, his sons and students demonstrated their remarkable ability to give life to the tiny hand puppets. What was demonstrated in terms of manipulative skills could hardly be believed at times. The speed at which puppets changed hands was uncanny, in fact, only when the action was slowed down, could one see what was happening. Fast movements are considered to be easy, slow studied movements the most difficult. These slow movements were exquisitely demonstrated by a female figure, her delicate walk, and the stroking of her hair. Other figures handled props such as fans with remarkable expression. Seeing such delicate movements close-up made one wonder if they could be seen in a larger theatre. The performances later showed that no detail is lost. This is due to the unique skill and ability of the performers to project movement over a distance.

"The work of this troupe is an object lesson in puppet manipulation, all puppeteers, regardless of their technique preference, should carefully study them."

*Video distributed by Electric Pictures.

Media Watch

Did anyone have insomnia one early September morning and watch (or even video, of course) Agnès Varda's *Jacquot de Nantes*, her evocation of the childhood and youth of her late husband, Jacques Demy? Demy, director of, among many other films, *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg, Les Demoiselles de Rochefort*, and *Lola*, was a puppetry enthusiast, and *Jacquot* reflects this, including his visiting puppet performances, building a puppet theatre and putting on his own shows, and making stop-action films. The Guignol theatre visited looked just like the one I went to in the Luxembourg Gardens, Paris, this summer (founded by Robert Desarthis in 1933 and now run by Francis-Claude Desarthis).

Readers may wonder why I mention *Spitting Images'* foreign counterparts so often. The reason is simply that, while their British progenitors were at their height during the Thatcher years, winning a Queen's Award for Industry in the process for their worldwide sales, their offspring abroad are still going strong. It seems that our satirists, despite the best efforts of Howard Brenton and Tariq Ali, simply enjoy hammering the Right much more than the Left, even when the latter are in power. This was quite literally true of cartoonist Steve Bell recently (*The Guardian*, 10 9 98): Thatcher grasps a bottle in one hand, a hand-puppet of Hague in the other: "Aaah... William – do you believe?" "I believe! I believe!" "Good...good! Now say: 'single currency over my dead body!'" "Single currency over my dead body!... And to prove I mean it I will drive this nail through my head!" Just William, with his little hammer, is as good as his word.

Vladimir Gusinskiy, one of the infamous Russian "oligarchs," a media magnate who provides financial support for NTV, said in the course of a long interview in *Kommersant Daily* (14 7 98): "I have been afraid many times. When the chiefs summoned me and said: 'If you show what is happening in Chechnya again, we will kill you.' They said this just like that – openly. When another chief said: 'You know, take *Kukly* [television programme which satirizes well-known politicians] off the air, or something will happen to you. That also happened. Moreover, it happened in the offices of the highest state authorities." *Kukly* still packs a punch. If you want to watch it outside Russia now (via satellite), you have to pay, as the programme has just been encrypted.

Latex puppets of various kinds appear on French TV at least once a day. The *Guignols* get an average audience of 3 million viewers on Canal+ each evening. Being the channel's top programme does not come cheaply, though: each show costs Fr200,000, roughly Fr30,000 per minute, and brings in Fr500,000 on average in advertising revenue; each Guignol costs the channel Fr43,000, a copy Fr7,000 (you may like to compare this with the prices for Russian and Israeli puppets quoted in the last issue). Plus, of course, the huge merchandising receipts.

The 10th anniversary of the *Guignols* is marked in a five-page feature in this August's edition of *Entrevue* magazine. Someone says in the article: "No one dares say he doesn't like his Guignol." Perhaps the French feel they can't, whereas Barry Norman, for example (interviewed in *The Guardian*, 14 9 98), says straight-out: "... I did not like the Spitting Image puppet! They gave me a huge great nodule on my forehead. I don't know where it came from. You could almost hang your hat on it... I don't think I've ever had anything like that. It was grotesque."

Personally, I admire more the nonchalance of Gerald Kaufman ("The Diary," *The Independent on Sunday*, 27 9 98), who says apropos of Gordon Brown's sympathy for him over his TV mugging – "*Spitting Image* was being very cruel in its depiction of Gerald Kaufman" (as reported in *Things Can Only Get Better* by John O'Farrell, resolutely Old Labour and a scriptwriter for *Spitting Image*) – "I was deeply touched in reading of Gordon's concern, but I was completely unaware of the cruelty of which he complained. People used to ask me how I felt about being on *Spitting Image*. The fact was I never watched it."

Surrealist describes the contribution by Mark Manning and Bill Drummond of the pop group KLF to the documentary on the enduring appeal of Punch and Judy, *Nasty, Brutish and Short*, made by *Spitting Image* creator Roger Law (Radio 4, 29 8 98). As part of the anarchistic conceptual art group, the K Foundation, they had attempted to give a Punch and Judy show to President Mobutu ("an analogy to the Devil") in Congo just before the war.

They explained their Heart of Darkness quest as follows: (Drummond) "The reason for us going up the Congo was to confront the Devil, because we wanted our souls back and we reckoned that, somehow, to be armed with Punch, we'd stand a better chance." (Manning) "It was just before the whole thing exploded – I mean you could just smell it, there were guns everywhere, bodies floating down the river and stuff. I was saying, 'There's bodies in the river, Bill,' and he kind of thought it was some kind of burial thing – but it wasn't." (Drummond) "... For about a week we were travelling up on these barges with 4,000 other people travelling up the Congo, third class. The only white people there, we were shit scared. Anyway, we didn't bring Punch out until the second week. And the moment we took him out – and we thought they'd love him – they saw him once, and there was this little boy who just whacked him. And the other people just said, 'No, put him away, put him away,' and they would have nothing to do with it. And we had to hide them for the rest of the journey. They obviously saw these things as some sort of evil, graven images... For them, they were all hard-line Christians." (Manning) "That was voodoo, man, not Christianity. I mean rattling bones and dancing and chickens flying all over...." (Drummond) "[Punch] wasn't just some sort of archaic, weird entertainment, child-like symbolism. For them it was totally and utterly for real."

The Express ran a two-page story "Puppet brings laughter to land haunted by hunger" (1 10 98) on famine-relief work in Sudan and described "two white men who were causing mayhem with a floppy hand-puppet called Seamus." This was not, by the way, Manning and Drummond, after accomplishing a feat of riverine navigation, but Morrissey (Paul) and Dunbar (Adrian) on a UNICEF tour. There are three accompanying photographs, but I am damned if I can make out the puppet – must be voodoo.

La Maison de la magie, devoted to Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin (from whom the American Harry Houdini took his name), has opened in a restored 19th-century mansion in the "father of modern magic's" adopted home town of Blois, on the Loire. It contains a collection of hundreds of exhibits and a 400-seat theatre. The project came to fruition this summer thanks to the tenacity of Jack Lang, mayor of Blois and former minister of culture, and the support of famous illusionists like David Copperfield. Incidentally, the last director of the Théâtre Robert-Houdin in Paris, which helped make Houdin a rich man, was Georges Méliès, who transferred many tricks of the trade to early cinema in films like *A Trip to the Moon*. (The centre closed for the winter 30 September, the telephone number for information is 02-54-55-26-26. Articles on it appeared in *Le Monde* 5 8 98, *The Guardian* 17 8 98, and *The Independent* 19 8 98).

Matthew Corbett has now hung up his glove-puppets, but he was to be heard as a contributor to the 50th-anniversary tribute "When Harry Met Sooty"(Radio 4, 15 7 98). Can there really have been a time when the BBC was worried about the corrupting effect the introduction of Sue might have on young minds ("Sex and the Single Bear," as one newspaper headlined the story)? A recent photograph in *The Independent* showed Ken Livingstone allegedly receiving tips on how to run his London mayoral campaign from the honorary mayor of Blackpool. Ken, you've never been anyone's puppet, my advice would be to steer clear of the semicentenarian Bear and stick to newts.

I have already mentioned the Roger Law portmanteau programme (see also article "Still pulling plenty of punches," *The Independent*, 27 8 98), which, among other things, contrasted the sad fate of, I imagine, a typical American performer, driven by the pressure of parents, *not children*, into producing a namby-pamby Punch, with an unregenerate British Punchman whose sausages, the stuffing being a Chinaman, come out of the machine wearing pigtails.

The *Yorkshire Post* (7 9 98) carried a particularly good half-page colour photograph of Professor Fiddle Faddle (Frankie Dean), flanked by Him and Her, on the beach at Filey. Dean "claims he has always kept violence out of his act, even before it became an issue." I would very much recommend film maker Alex Cox's "Freaks, Lies and Celluloid" (Radio 4, 1 9 98; see also article by Cox, *The Guardian*, 28 8 98), which examined very intelligently and commonsensically the portrayal of disabled people in feature films, to anyone interested in serious debate about the often trivialized (along no-more-Liverpudlian-stereotype lines) subject which labours under the unhelpful label of Political Correctness. The only film to emerge unscathed, by the way, was *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. We can only guess what the woman with a spinal deformity who criticized the Disney title *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* would have to say about our gibbous red-coated reprobate. Did anyone see Music Theatre Wales's new staging of Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy* at the Cheltenham Festival or elsewhere in July?

Horizon's "Raiders of the Human Body" (BBC2, 21 9) recounted the life of Gaetano Giulio Zumbo, the Sicilian "wax anatomist" (Sicily had a strong tradition of votive wax figures in churches), who made amazingly lifelike models of human bodies in the reign of Louis XIV, making both a scientific and artistic contribution to his times. Many of Zumbo's creations have now melted away, all the extant work definitely attributable to him (apart from "another head conserved in Paris"), including artistic "plague waxes" such as "The Triumph of Time," is to be found in Florence, where he worked for, among others, Cosimo III de' Medici. The programme revealed not only that his magnificent dissection models used real cadavers – the skull beneath the waxy skin – but showed the great popularity of anatomy *theatres*, into which thousands – hoi polloi and toffs alike – would crowd. An orchestra would quite often accompany a public dissection. However, we should not be too holier-than-thou at this historical phenomenon or, for that matter, even at the Marquis de Sade's going into ecstasy before the anatomical waxes in Florence, given our own age's widespread, often morbid, fascination with the body, as exemplified, say, by the monstrous mannequins of the Chapman brothers or, even more appositely, by the "plastinated" human corpses exhibited as art "objects" by the pathologist Dr Günther von Hagens (almost 800,000 people went to see an exhibition he organized in Mannheim last year).

Moscow's *Segodnya* newspaper carried a report (20 10 98) on the Obraztsov Theatre and the show *An Unusual Concert*, which has now had more than 12,000 performances in 60 countries since its creation in 1946 (see *The Guinness Book of Records*). I have seen the show, it has an undoubted place and has been inspirational, but I find the comment "It is not surprising that the theatre should open its new season with this show" complacent and possibly symptomatic of this theatre today. I hope it will be possible to publish more on the Obraztsov Theatre later.

The performances of Green Ginger's *Slaphead* and Faulty Optic's *Tunnelvision* at the BAC were enthusiastically reviewed by Dominic Cavendish in *The Independent* (28 10 98).

The BBC's Learning Zone (29 10 98) showed a 25-minute programme "Wayang Golek – Puppeteers of West Java."

La Danse des Kachina

Kachinas are dolls/figurines which represent the dancing spirits of rain and fertility associated with the Pueblo Indians' ancestral spirits, of which there are 300 to over 500, depending on the source you consult. They serve as playthings and devices whereby children are able to learn the identities of the spirits. Masked men impersonate kachinas in various ceremonies designed to bring wellbeing. Children learn that the dancers

Typical figure from *Kachina Doll Carving* by E Bromberg

are not real kachinas after initiation into the cult after the age of six.

The weird, wonderful and touching painted wooden figures, sometimes with feathers, vary from a few inches to several feet. Many of the objects in "La Danse des Kachina" exhibition at the Pavillon des Arts, Paris, 22 July-25 October 1998, came from the collections of André Breton and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who also had strong surrealist credentials, and I would recommend, in particular, the chapters "Partie liée: Le surréalisme et les Hopi" by Vincent Gille and "La révélation surréaliste" by Francine Ndiaye in the exhibition catalogue (*La Danse des Kachina*, Fr195, ISBN2-87900-408-X). However, it was not only surrealists like André Breton and Max Ernst who collected and were influenced by kachinas, Ndiaye also points out, for example, that some of Chagall's costume designs for Stravinsky's *Firebird* in 1945 are undoubtedly derived from kachinas rather than of African inspiration, as has been claimed.

Jomon, l'art du Japon des origines

Unlike the previous exhibition, this one, at the Maison de la culture du Japon, can still be seen in Paris – if you hurry (ends 28 November). It comprises 50 pieces from the Jomon civilization on the Japanese archipelago. The Jomon terracotta figurines are decorated by incised patterns or impressions of cord or matting (Jomon = cord pattern). Their role is disputed: fertility (dolls) – Earth Mother symbolism, the vast ajority of figures are female; magical-cum-therapeutic; shamanic; funerary. The exhibits include the 27-cm-high Venus of Tanabataka (3,500 to 4,500 years old), the only Jomon piece to figure among the country's 841 "national treasures," although another 26 on display merit the title "important cultural asset," of which there are a total of 9,929 in the lesser of the two categories of grading used in Japan since 1950. To revert to an issue raised earlier, the curatorial approach adopted here is resolutely aesthetic: the objects exist in a rarefied space removed from the common clay – the Neolithic people – from whence they came.

Mickey Aronoff here concludes her revelatory report on puppets behind bars.

Puppets in Prison Projects

Mickey Aronoff

Mexico

Cecilia Andrés is a performance puppeteer and former social worker. In collaboration with prison authorities, the Museo Nacional del Títere, Huamantla, and the Institute of Culture in Tlaxcala, Andrés has run very successful long-term projects in prisons in the State of Tlaxcala, where performances are also presented to the larger community.

"Engels and puppets," lamented Andrés, "are no longer fashionable." She feels that love and celebration of life are needed for theatre, to help fight against our denial of pleasure and depth, and our hopelessness.

In February 1994 Andrés received an invitation to carry out social reintegration workshops in the Huamantla prison, where prisoners are incarcerated long-term. Andrés stated no choices were offered and rules were strict. And, there was no interest in drama. Prisoners could attend any courses they wanted to escape anxiety or abandonment, but, because of their experiences, there was no trust of teachers, who were on the defensive.

La Loma is a maximum-security social centre with very repressive guards. In order to get trust, Andrés took the prisoners away from the guards. They used "psycho-physical" exercises, including eye-contact exercises, to gain confidence. Body-contact exercises were very threatening. In prison,

Andrés stated, there are two sexual roles: one either dominates or is dominated ("either kisses or blows").

They used bodies and action to "see" the texts of Wilde, Genet, José Agustín, Jack London, Javier Villafañe, and German List Arzubide; they listened to the music of the Kronos Quartet, Jorge Reyes, Federico Alvarez del Toro, Lito Vitale, and Astor Piazzola; they watched videos from different cultures – Pina Bausch, Katzuo Ono, Carlos Converso, Seiji Shimoda; and they presented puppet shows from Spain, Argentina, and Mexico. This meant, Andrés felt, that they did not have to listen to reason. She refused to give the prisoners the authority they looked for. The ensuing growth crisis meant it was time to start the show.

There were no windows in the rehearsal space. It was cold, and there was a lot of clanging noise from slamming metal bolts. The young prisoners had short attention spans. But they were tenderhearted and liked playing games. The first puppets they made showed links between themselves and the puppets. At first they abused their puppets, but then they developed caring relationships with them. They chose the "smoothest" texts. They performed to public, family and friends. Among the prisoners were a mime artist, a circus acrobat, and a fire-eater. One of their shows was called *Tender Transgressors,* and portrayed a circus using *mojigangas* (giant puppets) and masquerades to poems of the Spanish Golden Age.

The Apizaco Social Center was used as a national model. Here, there were more suitable spaces and older prisoners. The prisoners wanted theory, and they wanted a diploma to show they had taken part. There was a more complex code of practice. They made a show about police abuse. The director was very humane and understood the meaning of "social reinsertion." In the courtyard searchlights lit the *mojigangas*. A few days later the social centre had a new director, and everyone became discouraged. And they preferred human actors; they felt they looked ridiculous with puppets. Prison conditions worsened, hindering the project. Every rehearsal was a battle that made the group stronger. Collective strength was shown in their production, *Ceremonia sin Custodia.* Music, from such composers as Sabinas, Glass, and Trevor Watts, was essential and gave an increased level of passion.

In 1995 the National Week of Drug Dependency was proclaimed. There was a month of preparation for a show. The play, *Habits*, was performed in the old maximum-security area. They decided they could perform 10 more shows, to which university students were also invited, and they ended up performing 15 shows to 1,000 spectators. There was an incredible level of catharsis. Puppets allowed the prisoners to say things they had not dared to say before. Their self-esteem was raised, they cared for themselves better, and they had better relationships. They cared for their bodies as actors do. Communication increased, and they became more self-critical and demanding. They learned to incorporate accidents into their work, and they became more creative. They could interiorize and memorize movements and care for their puppets and the scenario.

Andrés ending by stating, "Man reconquers his primal nature. Freedom, grace and beauty are the natural attributes of every living organism."

UK (Safe Ground)

Safe Ground was founded in 1992 to promote literature and arts in the education of prisoners. Antonia Rubinstein, a theatre director, is Coartistic Director, along with Polly Freeman, parliamentary researcher and writer. Nick Barnes is also a part of the organization. The aims of the company are to assist prisoners and probationers in the development of social and practical skills, to advocate safe and effective teaching practice in prisons, to promote the efficacy of arts initiatives in the rehabilitation of offenders,

and to initiate links between prisons and the community.

They began their work in Felton Prison in 1992, working with young offenders. There had been many suicides in the prison. No qualifications were needed for the work at that time. Drama gave people an expressive outlet and a form of education in a place with no structured education. Rubinstein and Freeman were accepted by the young men after being sounded out on their own attitudes toward sexuality.

The staff was well-intentioned, but, as Rubinstein stated: "Hell is other people in confined spaces." She feels the British prison system is admirable (it encourages experimentation) and the prisoners spoiled, but says that they do not know how to take advantage of the possibilities. The staff are demoralized, tired, and uncreative. She and Freeman worked enthusiastically – without restriction.

They began with improvization, using the men's situations, but, as it was out of the women's experience and psychologically disturbing, it became dangerous. They decided instead to choose newspaper stories for the young men to enact, but the men chose stories that were too violent. So they went to literature – plays and novels. They used the novel as a "coat hanger" and taught young men how to penetrate the text. This, she felt, was a "gold mine." They had the "costume" of educators, but they chose the text.

It took six years to acquire the reputation to be asked by the Prison Service to make a film, and they were given money for creative projects. A film they made, about drugs, was researched and written by young men at Woodhill Prison over a six-month period. One of the best prisons, it is run by a woman. They cast and oversaw it in a remand prison, where people are moving all the time. This piece has no puppets (Freeman and Rubinstein use all aspects of theatre).

Another production was *Gulliver's Travels*, which dealt with issues of identity and nationhood. Puppets were a good metaphor for what prisoners were experiencing about finding their own talent and their legitimate place in the world. They worked with professional composers, artists, and lighting designers.

Another production was a play about a man who creates puppets in the cell of his imagination. A recurring image comes of a man (a puppet) that he made when he was a child – white, like a doll. He got teased for it and became ashamed to learn. He destroys the puppet and puts a new head on it. This performance, "a show without answers," was all done for the prisoners – to get them thinking.

The company has also developed a play, *The Seven Ages of Man*, in which prisoners, probationers, children, students and pensioners took part in a programme which enabled them to communicate with each other and exchange ideas on a range of social and educational issues. Puppets were used to identify where they were in their lives.

No psychotherapeutic staff are involved in follow-up, as the prisoners do not trust them. Rubinstein says they would rather use theatre and literature for self-discovery.

Rubinstein feels lighting is most important when creating puppet theatre, as one can then control mood and focus for concentration. She feels this helps the uneducated and people with lowered self-esteem. She stated that, for a workshop, one can use just four lights, a dimming board, a floor mat, an end-roll of newspaper, masking tape, four pens, and a tape recorder. Puppets become the vehicle/mediator for communication. Acting is about the individual, but puppetry demands that you put yourself into it and create a new character, to help find identity through creating a fictitious character. She showed a video of a puppet she had made of a homeless character. Three men, of three different races, and in prison for different reasons, are choreographing the puppet. She feels puppetry sensitized these men, and this

has to be encouraged: one needs to break down machismo, which Rubinstein calls a false identity. As artists, she stated, we want to bring out the best. The process of education and rehabilitation should be getting them to ask "Why?" and to see ways forward for positive change.

Now their programme includes follow-up to the creative process. The media are intent on showing that there is no good work in prisons. They want to challenge the blinkered "movers and shakers." Rubinstein stated one has to understand and play the system and hold back.

Rubinstein compared the prisons to those in South Africa. In the UK, she said, drugs are a bigger problem than AIDS, and she is worried that drugs are going to wipe out a large proportion of children in the UK. She stated that prison has also become comfortable for people, who do not want to leave as there are no jobs for them.

USA, UK

Mickey Aronoff, a therapeutic puppetry practitioner, has worked internationally over two decades in many institutional settings, including prisons. Until recently Therapeutic Puppetry Consultant for Scottish Mask & Puppet Theatre Centre and British UNIMA, she is now Therapy Consultant for Puppeteers of America. She is writing a book on the use of therapeutic puppetry in the paediatric hospital and lectures on and trains people in therapeutic puppetry..

Aronoff talked about puppet and mask work with people in actual prisons and about puppet work with people not in literal prisons but imprisoned by other means – by place, attitude, and ability, for example.

Her first prison experience took place in an honor farm touted as a model institution but which still had very punitive policies. This is where Aronoff learned that, given a small bend in time or situation, she could have been in prison not as a staff member but as an inmate. This is also where she learned that institutional silence was not a virtue – it served no one. The seeds were planted to use expressive arts another time, another place.

Bernalillo County Detention Center (BCDC), Albuquerque, New Mexico

Many years later Aronoff and physician's assistant Bebbie Weissman instituted mask-making workshops with both male and female prisoners and staff at this maximum-security institution. The goal was creativity: instruction was "showing by doing."

The women plunged in without hesitation. Therapeutic benefits accrued immediately, beginning with the massaging of faces with the Vaseline needed to keep the plaster from sticking to their faces. It was obviously a "safe" place where caring could take place; a sense of community quickly developed. Artistic skills used on the "outside" transferred to the activity "inside." Creativity brought learning and feelings of self-worth.

The strength was inherent in the masks even before the paint went on. Many women's masks covered the mouth (this was not true for the men). Sometimes the masks were blatantly autobiographical, sometimes purely decorative. Self-expression never waited for the finished product. At Christmas, the workshop was expanded into dramatic sketches. There was a lot of forced gaiety, with a strong layer of grief underneath.

The work with the women might be called "cathartic craft work." Its therapeutic byproduct was innately understood and acknowledged by all.

In the men's groups social workers met with the participants immediately after the masks were made for rehabilitative group sessions in which the therapy work would deal specifically with the masks the men had made and the feelings the characterizations elicited.

While the women innately seemed to understand and relish the point of the mask-making sessions, the men were at first unwilling participants. But, with humour, they accepted the situation. The minute the men began smearing Vaseline on their

partners' faces, attitudes dissolved into tenderness, and the room became quiet, bringing a touching depth and stillness to the work.

When the work became individual again, that is, when it was time to decorate the masks, a visual machismo resurfaced. Where the women might have used text to augment their masks' intentions, the men used strong design or body language. Colours and expressions painted on to the masks were bold. Whereas women expressed sadness easily and their stances were hesitant, men expressed strength or defiance.

As both projects permitted only enough time for single sessions of spontaneous craft and dramatic activity, one could personally only view the short-term benefits. One could, however, presume middle-range advantages. In the case of the women, shared activities and problems would help discussions to continue and deepen outside the craft area. In the case of the men, discussions and therapy were to continue, using the masks as a springboard. For the wonderfully sensitive staff, who made masks as well, the activity was definitely a humanizing one for that environment.

Barlinnie Prison, Glasgow

A short-term puppet project led by Scottish Mask & Puppet Centre introduced concepts of assertive behaviour to male prisoners in Barlinnie, a high-security prison. Puppets were to be used to enable the men to rehearse new types of behaviour in a fun and nonthreatening way. The puppet sessions, lasting two consecutive days, were part of a general three-week pre-release programme offered to young prisoners.

The men's initial attitudes to the project had been hesitant and negative, but, probably as the course was not optional, they soon decided to relax and enjoy themselves. To interject an element of fun and to introduce the idea of good puppet practice, they were first shown videos of professional performances. Most had had no actual exposure to the art form before. Non-issue-related sketches (humorous sketches that had nothing to do with why they were in prison or any kind of therapy) were devised and performed to loosen everyone up.

Problems they might encounter on the outside – for example, friends enticing them into trouble again, or difficulties with relationships – were brainstormed. Aggressive, passive and assertive solutions to some of these problems were demonstrated by the project leaders. Verbal and nonverbal signals were portrayed with humour, to make the work less threatening and more encouraging for them to practise.

The prisoners divided into groups, selected issues, and made performances based on them. They had been given a variety of glove-puppet characters (animal and human) to work with, but it would have been interesting, had the project been longer, for the prisoners to have made puppets as well. Props were also important and helped to indicate problems as well as motivate story and action, for example, a syringe, a bottle of alcohol, and a cigarette or marijuana. The performances were videoed, and there were discussions afterwards with participating staff. Puppets were looked at in terms of how they were used to express feelings through both body language and text.

The project was enjoyable and certainly interesting, but too late in the prisoners' stay to be of any lasting value: a "band-aid" effort. The staff valued the experience, but, again, problems of funding keep this type of project from being developmental.

Other Institutional work

Aronoff also spoke of work in institutions other than prisons in the UK, the USA, and in Singapore. Some examples of "imprisoning" situations helped by long- and short-term puppetry projects:

Children in paediatric hospitals whose expression is frozen by fear and improperly functioning bodies.

• Children with behavioural and emotional problems in psychiatric clinical-assessment

wards who lack the freedom to leave the institutions unless attended. The children are also emotionally restricted by their overwhelming problems.

• Wheelchair users for whom access – physical and social – was a serious problem.

• Adults who had strokes who were imprisoned by bodies not functioning well, depression over their situations, and by society's lack of access, leading to social isolation.

• Scottish ethnic-minority families with children with special needs in Scotland. These families were emotionally and socially imprisoned by their shame over having children with disabilities and by the economic hardships involved in having children with special needs.

Puppets in all cases helped accomplish such goals as freeing of expression, education, learning new skills and problem-solving, developing specialized assessment modes, improving voice and motor skills, elevating self-esteem, and reducing isolation within oneself and society.

Aronoff stated that when one loses the power to communicate, one loses the chance to be a part of society: mind, body, and soul are affected. But, in institutions where creative and expressive arts therapies are part of the "curriculum," humanity is fostered and positive change – both personal and societal – can be made.

England/France (Collaborators Theatre Company)

Dominique Grandmougin is the Collaborators' (French) Coartistic Director, and Deborah Maurice the Collaborators' (English) Coartistic Director. The company is based in Cumbria, UK, and uses all theatre arts, including puppets.

Their show, *Spring Loaded*, funded primarily by the Probation Service in the UK, uses large puppets and actors to look at the complexity of relationships in prison. It plays to audiences throughout the UK, including young people at risk, probation clients and prison staff.

Grandmougin spoke of the problems the company had with two actors based in two countries and the problems they have in being project funded. There was a great need for them to complement skills. They have now been established for five years. Both coartistic directors are from theatre practice, and the visual form was always present. Grandmougin had a background with Le Coq, and Maurice a background in circus and dance. Both had worked in institutions for people with mental disabilities. In those institutions Maurice used puppets rather than her own body to explore movement with the males.

They had been approached to do the *Spring Loaded* project by the writer, a repeat sex-offender. He gave them a text which was partly autobiographical, and it included reports of interviews between sex offenders and probation staff, mostly informed by television. They had to adapt the play for puppets after making sure that it was appropriate, which took a lot of work to do. They made an application for funding for new writers with the intention of bringing it to performance and received a full commissioning fee for the writer. *Spring Loaded* received the New Playwriting Panel First Show Award.

They were going to use actors for the play, but it would not have been possible to use actors to portray the physical and verbal violence of the sex offenders. They had to create a distance between the audience and the show in order to make it acceptable and even to laugh about the subject matter. The puppets represented in a simple visual way what the author wanted to say. The use of the puppet meant the director did not have to be realistic. The two important ideas were dehumanization and loss of private life, leading to paranoia. They showed the hierarchical difference between sex offenders and other offenders. There were two physical levels, the lower one being reserved for sex offenders, the upper for "higher caste" prisoners. The two communicated between the two levels. The sex offenders

become "legitimate" targets. They created a trap-door passage between the two levels.

They needed workshops for actors, writers, scenographers, and puppet makers. They then had to readapt the text, to reduce it for puppets.

The play showed the friendship between two men, Conrad and Tony. Conrad, 50, was in prison for embezzlement. Tony, who was younger, was in prison for violence. Conrad learns the prison rules from Tony. In exchange, he helps Tony with preparation for university entrance. This is the basis for their friendship. A few days before he is to be released, Tony is told to kill a sex offender. He is torn between going to university and obedience to the gang system. He chooses the latter. The author does not give a solution to the problems asked: the questions remain questions. The audience has to ask itself. Audience reactions were always violent – whether positive or negative. The show at least left no one indifferent.

Maurice talked about the problem of creating publicity for touring an unknown story that would fill seats with diverse people. During rehearsals the show was seen by probation-services visitors, who were concerned about young people and interested in how their clients might benefit. Some interest was shown from the prisons: they asked to see the script. At first, references to sex offenders, especially paedophiles, made the prison service people say no; they had wanted a performance with a workshop afterwards in support of the performance and skills. The Prison Service felt it showed interesting attitudes toward crime, both in and out of prison, but that it also showed the abominable attitudes of the prisoners. They felt it should be shown outside to people with the influence to change the situation, that it should also be shown where young adults already gathered, and that better theatrical support should be given. The Probation Office felt it was a novel way to deal with a complex problem.

The visual impact was strong enough to keep a young adult audience interested. They also selected good bands to come before and after the show (the theory being that placing the best band at the end would keep the audience there). This drew an unlikely audience, but they stayed behind. They especially liked the technical aspects and the essence of the play.

When asked what it was like working outside one's own culture, Grandmougin stated that his work is to bring out the similarities between cultures.

In a later interview about the collaboration involved, Grandmougin stated that he *believes* in collaboration. His dream would be international – artists having a chance to work abroad and bring back something new to their own work, their own country. He wants to make the world a better place, and feels that you have to live and work "there" to be able to do that. Maintaining the central thread, despite the difficulties, is taxing but worthwhile. Technical problems, which require a network of technical support, are minor when the dream is important. Duplication of services in each country is difficult but necessary. Despite e-mail, fax, etc, communication remains difficult. One still needs to learn to use the technology and to use it in a smart way to serve one's purpose. One has to make time for research. The business of finding resources is a job in itself.. Political games are sometimes necessary. Each summer they involve another country in training courses, but they need exploratory money for this as they actually need to meet up from time to time. Performances may have up to 45 people performing to 700 people seven nights a week. At least one-third of the people involved need to speak the language of the country they are in. Access to the course is as wide as possible. Grandmougin feels it is important to straddle socioeconomics and age. They live collectively and eat together. They have six weeks to form a company and tour. They are now in their second year of doing this.

MAC on the Seine

The Musée des arts et des civilisations will be opening on the Quai Branly, near the Eiffel Tower, in 2004. The site and the budget (1.1 billion francs) were confirmed by President Chirac, the initiator of the project, on Bastille Day. The museum will have 8,000 square metres in which to display objects from Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Oceania. Exhibits will be studied as much for their aesthetic as their ethnographic value. This was preceded by many years of passionate discussion over the location of the museum and, much more importantly, the place of "primitive" arts in the world of galleries and museums. The fact that the Louvre will be acquiring 120 "primitive" masterpieces at the end of 1999 is itself evidence that a long-standing European/ "Barbarian" dichotomy is breaking down, although it is not known yet whether they will be retained or transferred to the MAC in 2004. The exhibition "Angkor et dix siècles d'art khmer" at the Grand Palais last year, presenting aesthetically, not to say ascetically, Cambodian sculpture in all its purity, as one might, say, pieces by Michelangelo or classical Greek sculpture, and deliberately intended to be admired for its artistry instead of as an exotic incomer requiring (over)explanation is another case in point, although the question of understanding of context (background) does deserve serious consideration, and perhaps we are experiencing something like an aesthetic backlash here.

It is not, of course, that different curatorial approaches to presentation are not valid and will not remain so. You would have learnt more about the rainmaking of the Hopi and the Zuni from the exhibition of *kachina* dolls at London's Museum of Mankind a couple of years ago, which placed them in a clear ethnographic setting, than at "La Danse des Kachina" at Paris's Pavillon des Arts this summer, which adopted a more fine-art approach in its display (see also page 23), albeit we are dealing with degrees in this instance. There is undoubtedly a place for the pukka Victorian splendour of the Pitt Rivers ("Beware./You are entering the climate of a foreign logic/And are cursed by the hair/Of a witch, earth from the grave of a man/Killed by a tiger and a woman who died/In childbirth...." – as James Fenton puts it), one of my favourite haunts, but a simplistic schism between Art and ethnographic artefacts – High and low, them and us – is no longer sustainable. More "ethnographizing" of our *own* art also assists.

What has this got to do with puppetry you might well be asking. Well, personally, I like to see puppetry in the widest possible context, preferring the panoptic (impossible in practice, of course) to tunnel vision, but there is a specific reason for speaking of the MAC here, namely that it will become the repository of the Museé Kwok-on. This superb collection (roughly 10,000 items), devoted to the performing arts of India, Indonesia, China, and Japan, used to be housed at 41 Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, and the museum was, despite being too small to be able to exhibit more than a small part of its treasures at any one time (what's new there), just one more reason for the Marais being one of the most agreeable districts in Paris, but it has been closed now for a good four years, with the ever-present risk of Mr Kwok On's collection being spirited away, so we should banish nostalgia and (selfishly) rejoice that it is still going to be just a Channel hop away.

For me, Paris in 2004 looms as much more significant than a good deal of our millennial hoopla.

The Fifth International Bursa Karagöz Festival, 16-20 November

This Festival takes place in Bursa, Turkey, each November. It is organized by the Bursa Culture, Art, and Tourism Foundation and the Bursa UNIMA Branch, whose founder and chairman is R Şinasi Çelikkol. The Karagöz Art House was built in Bursa by the municipality in 1997 and is looked after by the Bursa UNIMA branch. It contains a

theatre, a large collection of Karagöz figures and documentation on traditional Turkish shadow theatre plus a collection of leather figures from other parts of the world. In addition to shows, there will be a symposium on puppetry and shadow theatre in the world and Karagöz and an exhibition on puppetry and Karagöz. The participants are: Nikolai Zykov Puppet Theatre – Russia; Czechoslovak American Marionette Theatre (Vit Horejs); Association for the Propagation of Karagiozis – Greece (Ioannis Chatzis); The Shadow Theatre Group – Israel (Micky Mevorach); with from Turkey the following Karagöz players – Orhan Kurt, Metin Özlen, Ünver Oral, Mustafa Mutlu, R Şinasi Çelikkol, Ali Meriç; and Erdinç Demiray (illusionist).

Contact the Secretary of the Festival, Uğur Çelikkol, at Kapaliçarşi Eski Aynah Çarşi No. 12/ 16020 Bursa, Turkey; tel/fax 224 2218727- 2205350; email ucelikkol@escortnet.com

The London Festival of Puppetry for Adults! 10-21 November

Against the UK norm of puppetry for children, Festival Director John Field hopes to provide something for "a more sophisticated and mature audience" at the Rosemary Branch Theatre in Shepperton Road, N1. Shows at 8PM unless otherwise specified.

10 & 18 Nov, Ken Haines' *Moving Tales*; **11 & 12 Nov**, Iain Thom, Zanni Fraser, and Mark Van Der Mander as Maybelline Lushlips + guests with the adult cabaret *Deeply Devastating and Mildly Mannered*; **13 Nov**, Rowan Wylie in *The Crow Show*; **14 & 15 Nov**, premiere of Wide Beam Theatre's *Tales of Magic and Monsters!* (**Sunday** show at **4PM**); **16 &17 Nov**, toy and paper theatre – Joe Gladwin's *Dracula* and Peter Charlton's *The Siege of Troy*; **19 & 20 Nov**, The London School of Puppetry's avant-garde evening of *Desired FX!* (**Friday** at **6PM**); **20 & 21 Nov**, Dan Bishop's very adult *Punch and Judy!*

Plus Ray and Joan DaSilva's *Casting Shadows*, a performance/workshop on projected shadows, **15 Nov 10.30-4.00**, £25; and Dan Bishop's *Come Tickle Your Swazzle* ..., a workshop on the basics of P&J for those with their own set of figures, **21 Nov 10.30-5.00**, £25.

Shows £7.50, concessions £5.00. Box office 0171 704 6665; John Field is contactable at No Strings Attached on 0171 690 7449.

Housekeeping

The only notice of Lee Tien-lu's death I came across in the British press was two telegraphic lines in a Sunday's *News in Brief* column. Nevertheless, this was enough to set off the hunt, and eventually I was able to track down a little more information (on the Internet). This illustrates the value which even the smallest snippet of news can have. I appealed in the last issue for cuttings: My thanks to John Furse for responding by way of an item from *Le Monde* on the Taiwanese at Avignon.

Newsletter **deadline 1 December**, *Bulletin* **deadline 1 February**. Bear in mind that a word processor produces scannable copy, otherwise copy usually has to be retyped; faxes won't scan either, which does not mean they do not have their uses.

Please note the editor's new email address.

ROBERT_FOWLER@RCCB.OSIS.GOV

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